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Soviet Defector Back on the Job at Moscow Paper.

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By SETH MYDANS

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MOSCOW, Nov. 21 — Oleg G. Bitov, a Soviet journalist who returned to Moscow three months ago after defecting to the West, reappeared in print today in his former newspaper with an admiring critique of an article by Norman Mailer about Russia.

Mr. Bitov, who said after his return that he had been kidnapped while on assignment in Italy and was forced to write anti-Soviet articles in Britain, has published detailed accounts of his year in the West in the pages of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

Today's article marked his return to normal publication in the newspaper. A spokesman for the paper said Mr. Bitov, who was foreign culture editor before his defection at the Venice Film Festival in September 1983, was now a columnist for the newspaper.

Defectors are rarely accepted back to the Soviet Union and even more rarely treated gently if they return. Mr. Bitov's treatment, and that of Svetlana Aliluyeva, the daughter of Stalin, who returned two months ago after 17 years as a defector, indicate a new Soviet approach.

Change in Policy Hinted

Both were put on display at news conferences after their return, and made statements denigrating the West and praising the humanity of their homeland. Western diplomats saw this treatment as indicating that the Soviet Union might want to tempt other defectors and émigrés to return home.

The official press agency, Tass, carried an item today on its foreign-language service pointing out the article by Mr. Bitov.

Last week two Soviet soldiers who had defected in Afghanistan returned to Russia from England, apparently voluntarily, after visiting their embassy in London. Their return has not been publicized here, and there has been no word on their fate.

Mr. Bitov, taking the sarcastic tone that is common in his newspaper and which he employed in his accounts of his year in the West, praised Mr.

Mailer for having tried, in what he called a naïve way, to overcome his acknowledged prejudices about Russia.

Mr. Mailer's article, titled "A Country, Not a Scenario" and published in the Aug. 19 issue of *Parade* magazine, was an account of a 15-day visit to the Soviet Union in which Mr. Mailer compared his observations with his preconceptions.

Not Quite What Was Expected

"You walk the streets of Moscow thinking: Is the Soviet Union as we have painted it, or have we painted ourselves into a corner?" Mr. Mailer wrote. "After 40 years of reading newspaper accounts about Russia, the trouble is that the country is not quite the way one expected it to be."

He then described his Leningrad hotel room, "not too unlike a high-rise Holiday Inn in such a place as Norman, Okla.," listed his breakfast menu, discoursed on relative prices and salaries and was struck by the architectural similarity of Soviet and Western high-rise apartment buildings.

Mr. Bitov noted the author's surprise at such observations, and added, "and he was altogether flabbergasted by the fact that he, an American, could walk wherever and whenever he wanted in Soviet cities and, no matter how hard he tried, could see no one following him."

"I list the naïve discoveries of the author not to laugh at him, nor in reproach," Mr. Bitov said. On the contrary, he said, he respected Mr. Mailer's attempt to see and understand what he could without prejudice.

"It is not the fault, but the misfortune of Mailer," Mr. Bitov wrote, if his visit "was too short to overcome the stereotypes embedded in his consciousness and memory."

The Horrors of Central Park

Mr. Bitov appeared to draw on his own sojourn in the West, including a visit to the United States, when he depicted in standard Soviet stereotype the horrors of a carriage ride through Central Park in New York.

"On the coach-box, side by side with the armed driver, sits, in the required

style, a plainclothes detective who is undoubtedly also not empty-handed: in the dark time of day, Central Park becomes the domain of hooligans and gangsters," he wrote.

In this context, Mr. Bitov mocked one of Mr. Mailer's central images, of a peaceful Leningrad Park where a young couple sat on a bench at night with a baby carriage beside them.

"That simple fact of life overwhelmed the venerable author," the Soviet journalist wrote.

Mr. Bitov, who is 52 years old, has presented as strong an indictment of the West in his recent articles about his year abroad as he did of the Soviet

Union in the articles he wrote during that time.

He described himself as having been beaten and drugged in Venice, then bribed and intimidated into defecting and into writing and speaking against the Soviet Union. He said he was constantly under the eye of Western secret services and had to play for time before he could make his break for home.

Differing versions of his story are offered in the West, and a degree of mystery still surrounds a number of aspects of his adventure. Most Western analysts tend to agree in their belief that his defection was genuine. They say the statements he is making now are the price of his return.